DRAFT - Letter to Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) re: Iraq

February 14, 1997

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The 208th General Assembly (1996) asked its Moderator to address the church on the subject of Iraq. After consulting with the Stated Clerk and the Worldwide Ministries Division – Middle East Coordinator – I am doing so by way of Presbyterian News and Notes.

The world knows that the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has been and is responsible for bringing unprecedented and incalculable suffering to the Iraqi people. Since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the response of the world community has been intended to punish the behavior of the Iraqi government. The unintended result, however, has increased suffering for the Iraqi people with tragic and unconscionable loss of innocent lives.

The imposition of sanctions by the United States and the UN, eased negligibly recently, has weakened the economic structures of Iraqi society, punishing the people, not the government.

At the urging of many Presbyterians, the 208th General Assembly (1996) meeting at Albuquerque, requested me to communicate the Assembly's deep concern for the deplorable conditions under which the people of Iraq are living. We have information that the lack of adequate nutrition, medication and medical treatment has been responsible for the death of perhaps a half million children. The spread of disease, with inadequate healthcare due to severe shortages of medicine and equipment, has put innumerable more lives at risk. People who formerly enjoyed an adequate living have had to sell their homes and other belongings in order merely to survive. And those of meager means have been swept away in the torrent of deprivation.

The recent agreement to allow Iraq, under very stringent controls, certain amounts of oil sales has been insufficient to address basic needs. Moreover, the clearance procedures and the lack of

purchasing capacity has limited the people's access to food, medicines and other humanitarian needs.

While deploring the intransigence and cruelty of the present Iraqi regime, the General Assembly felt impelled to speak out in Christian compassion on behalf of the suffering innocent. To express its concern, the Stated Clerk has communicated with the Secretary General of the United Nations, the President and all the members of the United Nations Security Council, the President and Secretary of State of the United States and the appropriate committees of the United States Congress. The Clerk has also conveyed the Assembly's concern to the general secretaries of the Middle East Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and the World Council of Churches. Oh behalf of Presbyterians, the Clerk also commended the Middle East Council of Churches in its efforts to respond to the needs of the Iraqi people, and has sought the counsel and assistance of the MECC to seek appropriate ways to convey these concerns to the Iraqi government.

We have also requested the Middle East area coordinator in the Worldwide Ministries Division, if the way be clear and as soon as may be possible, to make a visit to Iraq, to be accompanied possibly by a small representative group, to communicate our solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters in Iraq as they make their own witness in the midst of inconceivable suffering, and to give encouragement to others who are engaged in ministries of relief and compassion. In addition, we have requested the WMD, on behalf of the Assembly, to collate information about the people of Iraq, the current impact of the embargo and the effects of the U.S. and U.N. policies on their lives, and to make such information available, on request, to congregations desiring to learn more about the situation in Iraq.

The Assembly has also asked me , as your Moderator, and I therefore urge you:

- to pray for the people of Iraq, and for people throughout the Middle East, who are affected by all the conflicts in their region;

- to advocate change in the selective sanctions policy and practice of the United Nations and the United States;

- to keep yourselves informed about the humanitarian needs of Iraq, noting especially the material contained in the attached Background to the Resolution adopted by the 208th Assembly;

- and, in the name of our compassionate Lord, to support the humanitarian efforts of the church and the world community.

Finally, I commend you for your own concern for all of God's children, especially those who are in crisis or suffer the effects of political and military conflict. In this Lenten Season, let us pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ, and for ourselves, that we may grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ.